

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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DODE-00 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 DPW-01 L-03 IO-11

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R 081727Z APR 76

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9658

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 10407

E. O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: CASC, PFOR, VN

SUBJECT: REPATRIATION OF FRENCH REMAINS FROM NORTH
VIETNAM AND INFORMATION ON FRENCH POWS

REFS: (A) STATE 74245; (B) PARIS 09329

SUMMARY: EMBOFF SAW VETERANS' AFFAIRS OFFICIALS LATE APRIL 7 TO OBTAIN ANSWERS TO DEPARTMENT'S QUESTIONS ABOUT FRENCH EXPERIENCE CONCERNING REPATRIATION OF REMAINS OF FRENCH MILITARY WHO DIED IN THE INDOCHINA WAR. THE OFFICIALS WERE NOT ABLE TO ANSWER QUESTIONS CONCERNING FRENCH POW'S AND MIA'S, BUT THE QUAI IS GETTING THE ANSWERS FROM THE HISTORICAL DIVISION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY. VETERANS' AFFAIRS HAS BEEN VERY COOPERATIVE AND SAYS IT WILL HELP IN ANY WAY IT CAN. INFORMATION SHOULD STILL BE USED WITH DISCRETION AND SHOULD NOT BE SOURCED TO GOF PARTICULARLY IF IT APPEARS TO CONSTITUTE CRITICISM OF THE DRV, WHICH MIGHT RESPOND BY MAKING STILL FURTHER DIFFICULTIES FOR THE GOF.

1. DESPITE OUR URGING, SECRETARIAT OF STATE FOR VETERANS' AFFAIRS WAS UNABLE TO ARRANGE APPOINTMENT FOR EMBOFF PRIOR TO LATE APRIL 7. WE REGRET THE DELAY, BUT HOPE THAT THE FOLLOWING ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS IN REF (A)
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WILL STILL BE OF VALUE.

A. THE TERM "DIED FOR FRANCE" INCLUDES THOSE WHO DIED IN CAPTIVITY AND THOSE WHO DIED FROM CERTAIN NON-BATTLE CAUSES AS DURING TIME OF WAR. THE DETERMINATION IS MADE BY THE FRENCH MINISTRIES ON THE BASIS OF FAIRLY GENEROUS CRITERIA. THE FULL CRITERIA ARE BEING FORWARDED BY POUCH.

B. THE FOLLOWING ARE THE STATISTICS OF BODIES REPATRIATED FROM 1949 TO 1975:

1949, 1,437 BODIES; 1950, 3,320; 1951, 1,115; 1952, 1,145; 1953, 1,315; 1954, 1,172; 1955, 849; 1956, 548; 1957, 38; 1958, 37; 1959, 11; 1960, 9; 1961, 4; 1966, 307; 1968, 121; 1970, 215; 1972, 6; 1973, 7; 1974, 59; 1975, 32, FOR A TOTAL OF 11,747 BODIES.

C. VETERANS' AFFAIRS OFFICIALS REPEATED THE QUAI OFFICER'S ASSERTION THAT DESPITE THE PROVISION IN THE 1955 GRAVES AGREEMENT PROVIDING FOR RECOVERY OF POW REMAINS, THE FRENCH NEVER RECEIVED ANY REMAINS OF SOLDIERS WHO DIED UNDER VIET MINH CONTROL, SUCH AS THOSE WHO DIED IN CAPTIVITY. IN ADDITION, FRENCH TRIED WITHOUT SUCCESS FOR YEARS TO RECOVER AT LEAST SOME OF THE MANY DEAD BURIED IN DIEN BIEN PHU. OFFICIALS SAID THAT A POSSIBLE EXPLANATION WAS THAT THE 1955 AGREEMENT PROVIDED FOR THE FRENCH REPATRIATION OF VIET MINH DEAD IN SOUTH VIETNAM AS WELL AS NORTH VIETNAMESE ASSISTANCE IN RETURN OF FRENCH DEAD FROM THE NORTH. SINCE THE GVN QUICKLY OBTAINED POWER IN SOUTH VIETNAM AND DID NOT COOPERATE WITH THE FRENCH ON THIS MATTER, THE DRV HAD GROUNDS NOT ONLY FOR LIMITING COOPERATION TO REPATRIATION OF REMAINS FROM FRENCH CEMETERIES BUT ALSO FOR CHARGING SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNTS FOR ANY SERVICES. (FRENCH ESTIMATED COSTS ARE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 PARIS 10407

APPROXIMATELY 20 TIMES ACTUAL PAVN EXPENSES.)

D. AS THE FIGURES PROVIDED IN A AND B ABOVE SHOW, THE REPATRIATION OF REMAINS ACTUALLY STOPPED IN 1961 EVEN THOUGH THE FRENCH GRAVES OFFICERS HAD BEEN EXPELLED IN 1960. REPATRIATION BEGAN AGAIN IN 1966. THE EXPULSION WAS CONNECTED WITH THE PAVN DESIRE TO EXHUME THE BODIES FROM THREE CEMETERIES IN HANOI CITY TO CONCENTRATE THEM IN THE BIG CEMETERY 25 KILOMETERS FROM HANOI, AND TO CHARGE THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT FOR THE TRANSFER. THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT, WHICH WISHED TO MAINTAIN THE THREE CEMETERIES, REFUSED TO PAY.

E. WE DID NOT FURTHER PURSUE THE QUESTION OF "INITIAL POLITICAL PRICE"; IF ANSWER IN REF (B), PARA 2, IS INADEQUATE, WE CAN ASK POLITICAL LEVEL OF THE QUAI.

F. VETERANS' AFFAIRS DOES NOT HAVE STATISTICS ON POW'S HELD, RELEASED, DIED IN CAPTIVITY AT THE TIME OF THE GENEVA AGREEMENT. THE QUAI WILL ATTEMPT TO GET SUCH STATISTICS FROM THE HISTORICAL DIVISION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY; THE FRENCH BELIEVE THESE FIGURES HAVE ALREADY BEEN PUBLICLY RELEASED AND CAN BE SOURCED TO SOME PUBLICATION.
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G. AS IN PREVIOUS QUESTION, QUAI WILL ATTEMPT TO OBTAIN THE ORIGINAL AND CURRENT LISTING, IF THERE IS ONE, OF THE MIA, POW AND DESERTERS NOT ACCOUNTED FOR.

H. THE FRENCH CANNOT PREDICT HOW MANY BODIES NOR OVER WHAT TIME FRAME THEY WILL BE REPATRIATING REMAINS FROM VIETNAM. AS RECENTLY AS FEBRUARY THE DRV INFORMED THE GOF THAT 566 REMAINS HAD BEEN EXCAVATED IN TAI BINH PROVINCE. THE FRENCH WILL NOW HAVE TO PROCESS THESE REMAINS, INCLUDING THE REPATRIATION OF ALL THOSE

WHICH CAN BE POSITIVELY IDENTIFIED AND FOR WHICH THE FAMILY HAS REQUESTED REPATRIATION. THE FRENCH ARE ALSO WORKING ON A LARGER PROGRAM WHICH MAY MEAN THE REPATRIATION OF 24 TO 30,000 BODIES FROM NORTH AND SOUTH VIETNAM. THIS WOULD BE A PROGRAM STRETCHING OVER AT LEAST THREE YEARS AND WOULD BE QUITE EXPENSIVE AS WELL AS LOGISTICALLY DIFFICULT SINCE ALL MATERIALS CONNECTED WITH HANDLING REMAINS MUST BE PURCHASED ABROAD AND SHIPPED TO VIETNAM. HOWEVER, GIVEN THE PROBLEMS OF NEGOTIATING A COLUMBARIUM FOR HANOI AND THE CONTINUING PAYMENTS FOR UPKEEP -- WITHOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF VERIFICATION THAT UPKEEP IS INDEED PERFORMED -- THE GOF CONSIDERS REPATRIATION PERHAPS THE PREFERABLE SOLUTION.

2. VETERANS' AFFAIRS OFFICIALS SEEM SOMEWHAT MORE RELAXED THAN QUAI ABOUT U.S. USE OF INFORMATION CONTAINED IN THIS CABLE AND PREVIOUS. HOWEVER, THEY NOTED THAT ANYTHING WHICH APPEARED TO BE CRITICISM OF THE DRV WOULD NOT FACILITATE THE FRENCH PROGRAM OR OVERALL FRANCO-VIETNAMESE RELATIONS. IN ADDITION, THE FRENCH REMARKED THAT THE U.S. AND FRENCH EXPERIENCES ARE VERY DIFFERENT; THE FRENCH ARE REPATRIATING BODIES WHICH THEY THEMSELVES BURIED, WHILE THE U.S. IS REPATRIATING BODIES BURIED BY THE VIETNAMESE, A CATEGORY NOT AVAILABLE TO THE FRENCH). THE FRENCH EXPERIENCE IS THEREFORE ONLY PERIPHERALLY PERTINENT TO U.S. PROBLEMS. OBVIOUSLY THE VIETNAMESE APPROACH IS DRAWN FROM THE SAME NATIONAL CHARACTER AND IS BASED ON THE VIETNAMESE KNOWLEDGE THAT THE REMAINS ARE OF VALUE TO THE FRENCH OR AMERICANS BUT NOT TO THEMSELVES. THE FRENCH THOUGHT
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THAT THE GENERAL CONCLUSION THAT THE VIETNAMESE WILL BE DIFFICULT TO DEAL WITH WAS A CONCLUSION TO WHICH THE U.S. COULD COME WITHOUT IMPLICATING THE GOF IN SUCH A JUDGMENT. WE ACCORDINGLY BELIEVE THAT THE GENERAL INFORMATION, INCLUDING THE STATISTICS NOTED ABOVE, MAY BE USED PROVIDED WE DO NOT NOTE THAT THE GOF PROVIDED THIS INFORMATION. WHEREVER INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE FROM PUBLISHED SOURCES, THE GOF WOULD PREFER THAT WE CITE THE SOURCE. FOR OTHER ANSWERS, THEY WOULD EXPECT US TO SAY THAT "WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE FRENCH HAVE HAD THE FOLLOWING EXPERIENCE..." AGAIN, VALUE JUDGMENTS SHOULD BE CLEARLY LABELED AS OUR OWN.
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